

when we said yes
she poured the coffee
and cheerfully requested
seventy four cents for it.

pretty big of me
i thought
not to strangle her
right on the spot.

-- Paul Stroberg

Lombard IL

STRAWBERRY LIP GLOSS

For too long now, I have been employed as a bouncer at a nightclub near my home. It is not intellectually stimulating work and I have not met many girls there that I wanted my mother to meet also. But, it is okay work if one has big muscles and little ambition. I am told I have both. When I am not busting heads, things can get pretty dull at work. It can be boring. My mind when left idle tends to ruminate over all my body's infirmities. Usually, I like to concentrate on my most debilitating injuries, but sometimes, as a change of pace, I suppose, I like to think about trivial, but vexing, maladies like canker sores, rug burns and plantar warts. On one particular evening, the evening I am preparing to tell you about, my mind fixed on my chapped lips. Now I know that chapped lips aren't exactly spinal meningitis, but let's be fair, chapped lips, seriously chapped lips, can be very painful. I tried not to think about them. I tried very hard to just ignore them. I tried and tried. Try as I might though my lips still hurt. Chapped lips don't just go away. They require chapstick. And chapstick I didn't have. I started bitching about them. Bitch, bitch, bitch, bitch, bitch. Finally, the ticket girl offered me some of her strawberry lip gloss. It wasn't an act of kindness. She was just tired of hearing me bitch. What I mean is, it's not as though she were the Florence Nightingale of chapped lips, or something. Anyway, I accepted her offer to use the strawberry lip gloss.

Normally, I am a proud man, too proud to wear a girl's strawberry lip gloss. But a man with seriously chapped lips can't afford to be proud. Chapped lips are very humbling. I put the lip gloss on. It was the most cloying odoriferous strawberry scented shit I ever hope to smell. It undermined my masculinity. You could smell it a mile away. But it really did help my lips. Forgot all about them, in fact. So time comes, as I knew it would, when I had to kick some guy out. As luck would have it, he was a pretty big guy, too. Furthermore, he was with a friend of similar stature who was equally adverse to his leaving. And I smelled like a pie. "Gotta go," I said, smelling like jam. The redolence of strawberries wafted through the air. "What?" asked his big hard-of-hearing friend. "HE'S GOT TO LEAVE. HE CAN'T GRAB THE WAITRESSES' TITS!" I said, trying to look big and slightly deranged, while smelling like a preserve. "Oh," he said. "Oh," said his hard-of-hearing friend. They did leave, too, but not with the degree of urgency that I was used to. They didn't exactly run out the door, screaming and begging for their lives. They probably realized what most people have known for some time now. A guy wearing strawberry lip gloss can only be so tough.

I WAS NOT A BUNNY

"I was not a bunny," she said. "I was a centerfold." I had made the mistake of addressing her as a former bunny, which she was not, rather than as a former centerfold, which she was. "Bunnies," she said, "are the girls with the ears and the tails. They work at the clubs and the resorts. They're like waitresses, sort of. The centerfold is the model at the center of the magazine with the staples in her navel. The fold out. I was a centerfold." I nodded my head. "I see," I said. "Sorry." "Don't be," she said, "everybody makes that mistake, confusing the bunnies with the centerfolds."

We were sitting in the physical therapy section of a Pasadena chiropractor's office. The ice pack strapped to her knee and the hot towels draped over my shoulder were